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ABSTRACT

This collection of essays discusses excellence and achievement in urban schools. "Needed: Excellent Teachers for Urban Schools" (Diane Ravitch) suggests that the best thing to do to help urban students is to ensure that they have excellent teachers. "Beyond the Courage to Change Urban School Systems" (Rudolph F. Crew) discusses how much difference the care, guidance, and attention of a teacher can make in the lives of young people. "An Excellent Education for All" (Wendy Kopp and Nicole Baker) identifies as the common characteristics of the most successful Teach for America corps members the fact that they approach their jobs in the same way that successful leaders in any context would. "How Houston Improved its Urban Schools" (Donald R. McAdams) identifies the key factor in the improvement of Houston's schools (the business and civic leadership of Houston and activist parents who made school improvement a priority, actively involved themselves, and worked closely with the board and district year after year). "Did You Know?" (Anne Rogers Poliakoff and M. Rene Islas) presents data on how the U.S. high school completion rate has remained constant, why lower graduation rates were reported by a private study, and declining science scores for 12th graders. (SM)

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Anne Rogers Poliakoff, Ed.

BASIC EDUCATION
A MONTHLY FORUM FOR ANALYSIS & COMMENT

Vol. 46, No. 5, Dec. 2001

URBAN SCHOOLS: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP, EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING, SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Council for Basic Education

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A Monthly Forum For Analysis & Comment

URBAN SCHOOLS

Community Leadership

Excellence in Teaching

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Roughly 11 million young people attend school in an urban district–one out of every four American children, according to the 1998 *Education Week* report, *Quality Counts '98: The Urban Challenge: Public Education in the Fifty States*. This is one reality.

Another reality is that most of these young people will not leave school having acquired what we could, in good conscience, label an education. Analyses of national test scores demonstrate that students in urban schools are less likely to succeed than those in other schools, and students in poor urban schools are the least likely to succeed. The 1998 *Ed Week* study reported that, in urban schools, "more than half of 4th and 8th graders fail to reach the most minimal standard on national tests in reading, math, and science." The story is even worse in those urban schools where most students are poor: two-thirds or more perform below the basic level.

It is grievous enough that, nationwide, one in every four students quits high school before receiving a diploma (see *Did You Know*, p. 20). The numbers are worse in some urban schools–more students leave school, for example, in Cleveland and Memphis, without a diploma than with one. For African American and Hispanic students, the statistics are even more catastrophic. And of course, we know that the diploma itself is not always a guarantee of even minimal educational achievement.

The odds against success for a child seeking an education in a poor, urban community are overwhelming. Many observers explain this grim situation as the inevitable result of the world in which the schools try to educate–neighborhoods beset by violence, poverty, joblessness, poor housing, and despair. The schools themselves often suffer deteriorating facilities, teachers without adequate training, fewer books and other resources, and students hindered by the conditions of their upbringing. With some justification, these observers blame the public and the politicians for expecting schools to overcome the most profound social and economic problems of our time.

But for some this explanation has become an excuse.

Looking at urban schools through the lens of despair is habitual, and it is easy, but it distorts our vision of what we could accomplish and provides an out to those looking for one. We have a growing body of evidence that when we give our young people leadership, outstanding teachers, and our steadfast commitment to their ability to excel, they will blossom into achievers against the odds of urban realities.

Our authors choose this more positive stance. Leadership and vision are the twin pillars: in the classroom, in the front office, and in the community. Diane Ravitch insists that we abandon the notion of an iron bond between poverty and academic achievement, and makes the case that the best thing we can do for children in urban schools is to ensure they have excellent teachers. Rudy Crew reminds us how much difference "the care, guidance, and attention of a teacher" can make in the lives of young people, and points to the need for systemic change. Wendy Kopp and Nicole Baker identify as the common characteristic of the most successful Teach for America corps members the fact that they approach their jobs in the same way that successful leaders in any context would. Donald R. McAdams identifies as the key factor in the improvement of Houston's schools the business and civic leadership of Houston and activist parents who made school improvement a priority, actively involved themselves, and worked closely with the board and district, year after year.

Here at the Council for Basic Education, we have taken our belief that all children can learn, along with our expertise, into urban communities across the U.S.– including cities with some of the toughest problems and weakest achievement records. For example, as part of a strategic plan to overhaul the District of Columbia Public Schools, CBE has developed the Principals' Leadership Academy, the purpose of which is to strengthen instructional leadership by principals in order to achieve standards-based teaching and high academic performance by students. In the Cleveland, Ohio Municipal School District, CBE has conducted a series of workshops on English language arts standards and trained more than 500 teachers to score and analyze student writing using a standards-based rubric.

ARP

NEEDED: EXCELLENT TEACHERS FOR URBAN SCHOOLS

By Diane Ravitch

For years it has been well known that children in urban districts are far behind their suburban counterparts on every measure of academic achievement. Urban children are also likelier than suburban children to come from families whose income is low and whose educational background is comparatively low. Concentrations of poverty are highly correlated with poor school achievement.

Some observers treat the relationship between poverty and academic achievement as an iron bond that can't be broken, let alone changed. Nearly forty years ago, the eminent psychologist Kenneth B. Clark blasted this analysis and called it "the cult of cultural deprivation." He said that it was just as determinist to blame school failure on children's environment as it was to blame it on their genetic makeup, because it allowed prejudiced people to say that "these children" can't possibly learn because they live in a slum neighborhood.

What can schools do? They cannot directly affect the supply of good jobs or housing, but they can have a powerful effect on their students by preparing them for success in school and in society. Under the tutelage of good teachers, students will master the expectations of their grade and earn a sense of confidence in their ability to meet new challenges. As they learn to read, write, solve mathematical problems, understand science and history, and speak a foreign language, they learn to believe in themselves. Students who are successful in school will be ready for higher education, and they will have the skills and knowledge to persist in high school and in college.

Thus, the best thing that our society can do for children in urban schools is to make sure that they have excellent teachers. Certainly there are many superb teachers in big-city

public schools, but there are far too many who are uncertified, unprepared, and poorly educated.

The Education Trust, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, contends that poor academic achievement has more to do with low standards, inadequate curriculum, and undereducated teachers than with students' poverty. Kati Haycock, the director of that group, maintains that if poor and minority children had teachers of the same quality as other children, "about half of the achievement gap would disappear." She goes further to argue that if districts assigned their best teachers to the students who need them most, then "we could entirely close the gap."

Poor and minority children are not getting our best teachers.

Unfortunately, poor and minority children are not getting our best teachers, nor are they getting teachers of similar quality to those who teach in favored suburbs. Part of the reason is difference in pay, but it is not the only reason. The fact is that many states have extremely low standards for those they hire to teach, and disproportionate numbers of ill-prepared teachers are assigned to teach in inner-city districts.

High-poverty classrooms tend to have a higher percentage of under prepared or poorly educated teachers. Most states do not set high standards for entry into the teaching profession. In addition, the seniority-transfer system, which governs teacher assignment in many big-city districts, allows experienced teachers to choose their school and to avoid what they perceive as an undesirable assignment.

Good teachers know their subject, and they know how to teach. However, many states ignore the importance of content knowledge, which encourages education schools to ignore it as well. Content knowledge can be tested, but classroom know-how is best assessed not with a paper test but by performance in the classroom. But many states test pedagogical knowledge and low-level basic skills, while minimizing or overlooking content knowledge, or they set

passing scores so low that it is hard for prospective teachers to fail their tests. Today, at a time when students are expected to pass challenging examinations, their teachers should be able to demonstrate that they have mastered the content that they will be expected to teach.

States need to raise their expectations for teachers, particularly those who intend to teach in inner-city schools. At the very least, teachers should be expected to pass the high school graduation tests for the state in which they hold a license. It is not good enough to assess nothing more than tenth-grade literacy skills, as many states do now. If states change their expectations, education schools will change what they teach in order to qualify their graduates.

Schools that serve high-poverty neighborhoods have unusually high numbers of teachers who are "out of field," that is, teachers who have neither a major nor a minor in the field they are teaching. Richard Ingersoll, a sociologist who has studied out of field teaching, has found that 29 percent of those who teach life science in low-poverty schools are "out of field," as compared to 40 percent in high-poverty schools. Similarly, 27 percent of math teachers in low-poverty schools are "out of field," as compared to 43 percent in high-poverty schools. Ingersoll has also found, on the basis of federal surveys, that students in high-poverty and high-minority schools are twice as likely to have teachers who are not certified in their field.

Teachers in urban schools today must know both their subjects and their students. Those who teach a particular

States need to raise their expectations for teachers.

subject should have either a major or minor in that subject or be able to demonstrate that they can pass a challenging examination in it. Too many students, especially in big-city districts, have teachers who are kind and caring, but who cannot help their students meet state standards.

Again, it was Kati Haycock who wrote that "We take the children who are *most* dependent upon their teachers for

academic learning and assign them our weakest teachers." There are many reasons for this scandalous situation, including salary differentials, teacher shortages, inadequate funding, state policies that ignore content knowledge, and education schools that care about pedagogy but not content.

None of these reasons, however, is defensible or justifiable when the consequences are so pernicious for society's most vulnerable children. None of these policies is beyond the reach of our policymakers if they truly want to make a difference in the lives of inner-city children.

Diane Ravitch, Ph.D. is a historian of education at New York University and author of numerous books, including **Left Back: A Century Of Battles Over School Reform.**

BEYOND THE COURAGE TO CHANGE URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

By Rudolph F. Crew

I was recently visiting schools and had the occasion to speak with several middle school and high school students. They were an impressive group by any standard and, with modest prodding on my part, began to share their sense of what it was about school that added richness and value to their lives. A common theme emerged. Simply put, it was the relationship that they had with teachers and the significance and power that teachers had in shaping whether students saw themselves as capable, indeed artful learners. Even those students who doubted their academic adequacy, and asserted their reservations about college choices or placement in the workplace with certainty, reserved a wistful longing for the possibility that they too might be successful– with the care, guidance, and attention of a teacher. As one tenth-grader put it, "I'd like it if they would call my home and tell my parents that I did a good job today. You know, that I got that effort thing going on and that I'm learning."

As I watched and listened to the rising pitch of anxiety in this "how they see us" conversation, I was drawn more pointedly to the issues and complications of changing urban school systems and to ask why, after so many years of valiant efforts by those in and around the K-12 universe, there is still quite a distance to go before victory is proclaimed. What these students were saying was, in essence, give me a teacher who cares about and knows me, not for the neighborhood from which I come or the land from which I have emigrated, but for the ideas and expressions of intelligence that I bring to school and manifest in your classroom. Notice me! I am worth your time, regardless of my parents' net worth or lack thereof. I want to know what you know about your subject and about life. I bring passion to the day and I am willing to share it with you.

Teach me. Dig down deep into your repertoire of strategies and skills and find a way to teach me the algebra or whatever else I need to see college as a possibility in my life. My brain can learn all the same things that yours did, if I am taught and if I commit the effort. Help me to make meaning of things that few in my family have ever even heard of or been exposed to. Understand my community as a place in a city as well as in history. And like yours, it is rich in tradition, language, and culture, so much so that it forms the basis of my patterns of learning as well as speech. My self-respect is tied to what I tell myself about how well I am doing against the standards in

A litany of loosely conceived ideas for change is not valuable.

your class or in this whole school. I want your feedback when things are going well and when they are not. Deal?

Our response to our children's request for more powerful and effective schools has been inspirational, at times thoughtful, but all too tepid. It is as though we hear their voices, collect data on their learning, and then remain organizationally paralyzed to address their needs. Consequently, high schools generally look the same and are still driven by the Carnegie unit (seat time). Innovation is generally unrewarded and best practice is seldom scaled up to a systems level. Low performing schools remain unchanged and the 180 school-day year ends on a note of mediocrity.

The notion of all children being able to learn is a message that still resonates with most educators. But the larger question of how leaders will build instructional coherence between the learning of adults and the children they teach is still an enormous challenge requiring a rigorous campaign-like courage to explore and utilize the points of leverage within urban school systems where ideas and teaching strategies are born, consistently executed and supported, measured, and retooled against the inertia of organizational sameness, fear, and lost hope. A litany of loosely conceived ideas for change is not valuable here. Nor is the constant ho hum of inspiring

speeches designed to create an "amen corner." These things pass quietly in the night and leave schools, central offices, leadership, and teaching largely unchanged.

The achievement gap is a systems problem and indeed requires the instructional attention of the system–that is, all departments, all schools, all principals, and all teachers. It is not a problem only for the lowest performing schools. Rather it is a symptom, that for at least a third of the students in any school, learning is a series of episodic lessons, some understood, some not, created out of a school and district culture where poor teaching goes unexamined and unsupervised, where neither principal nor teachers engage in the work of understanding the phenomenon. The lesson here for leaders is to take direct and strategic aim at and within the system, and manage data in a way that builds conversation and commitment to answering the hard questions about student work and the work of teachers in creating and sustaining an instructional repertoire with which to teach all children. Poor children can be taught, but not without reengineering the system.

Focus on literacy. The organizational sophistication of urban school systems requires focus, focus, and more focus. Having spent years trying to hit instructional moving targets prescribed by politicians, and revolving door superintendents and principals, most teachers are frankly confused about what's important to the system. Is it test scores? Is it

The achievement gap is a systems problem.

attendance? Is it safety? And on, and on. Whichever road is taken, it must lead to a student being able to read fluently, with comprehension, and to write and make meaning from language. The question facing urban schools is a human resource issue: that is, how to support the development of teachers and their principals in order to organize around the purpose of literacy, expressed in achievable performance goals.

And last, leaders of schools and districts need far more than the current credentialing processes offered through schools and education programs. The skill set needed to do these jobs

is outstripped only by the lack of change in the preparation currently provided by the academy. In the end, the voices of the students mirror the voices and needs of the adults who teach them and run their schools and districts. We need to pay more attention to how teachers are supported and how schools are led. It is not likely that more money will be given to urban schools in the near term.

The challenge ahead is not simply born out of questions of instructional alignment, new assessments, or standards. Transformation of urban schools will require the courage to know more on the engineering side rather than the pedagogical side. How do principals and teachers come to know these strategies for literacy? At what cost? Over what period of time? How will these strategies be used to support new teachers? We know a great deal, and where that knowledge has been applied, managed, and strategically driven into practice, children and whole systems show marked improvement. Urban school districts offer tremendous opportunities to hear the voices of children previously silenced by poverty and hopelessness. And for adults, it offers the opportunity to build systems that work, reconnect to passionate visions that brought us into the profession in the first place, and the chance to act courageously in a time of great need.

Rudolph F. Crew, Ed.D. is Director, District Reform Initiatives, The Stupski Family Foundation, and formerly served as Chancellor of the New York City public schools.

AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION FOR ALL: LESSONS LEARNED BY TEACH FOR AMERICA

By Wendy Kopp and Nicole Baker

Children growing up in central cities often face tremendous socio-economic challenges, including minimal access to health care, limited pre-school opportunities, lack of economic opportunity, and insufficient social services. Schools are usually not set up to offset these challenges and, as a result, children growing up in low-income communities are seven times less likely to graduate from college than children in high-income areas. Teach For America's mission is to help eliminate this achievement gap. We have seen through first-hand experience that, despite challenges generated by poverty, children in urban communities have the ability to achieve at the same, or greater, rate as their peers.

During the past eleven years, Teach For America has placed more than 8,000 outstanding recent college graduates in schools in our nation's urban and rural communities. These highly sought-after young leaders from all academic majors have committed to teach for two years in places like South Central Los Angeles, the South Bronx, rural Louisiana, and the Mississippi Delta. Year after year we have seen our corps members go above and beyond traditional expectations to ensure that their students make academic gains. For example, Ray Chin started an AP Biology class at his school in Los Angeles and coached 20 out of 26 students to a score of 3 or better on the AP exam. As a Phoenix corps member, Nicole Sherrin led her 120 math students, among the lowest performing students in her district, to outperform other students not only in her district but in surrounding districts as well. What are these teachers doing to achieve such dramatic results in their classrooms?

Teach For America has learned valuable lessons about what successful teachers do in the classroom. We have learned that there is nothing magical or non-replicable about what leads some of our corps members to succeed in erasing the achievement gap for their students. Their success is not dependent on their having dynamic personalities, or on the peculiar circumstances of schools or students. In fact, we have seen that our best teachers have varying instructional styles and personalities.

The common denominator among our most successful corps members is that they approach their jobs in the same way that successful leaders in any context would approach their

These teachers are relentless in their pursuit of results.

positions. These teachers set a vision and goals for what they want students to accomplish by the end of the year, motivate the students and their parents to work hard to attain those goals, and then work strategically and proactively to get there. Their classrooms radiate a sense of urgency, as they maximize every moment of the school day to reach their objectives. These teachers are relentless in their pursuit of results, in spite of obstacles or challenges, and they are driven to learn constantly in order to increase their students' achievement.

Independent of all the great examples we have of corps members and other teachers completing Herculean tasks in the classroom, it is a fact that our country could make it easier for teachers to achieve academic gains with all students. The following three ideas can help move our country toward systemic educational change.

Beliefs. Before we tackle any systemic reform, we need to ask ourselves some important questions: Do we truly believe that all children can achieve at high levels? Do we believe that all urban children and youth have the ability to attain academic levels equal to or above those attained by their suburban counterparts? We must commit to this huge goal, in spite of the studies, statistics, and stories that repeatedly describe the challenges in urban schools. Then we need to commit to the

hard work that is necessary to provide an excellent education for every child.

Resources. It is simply logical to recognize that we need more resources dedicated to urban schools. While we know it is possible for teachers and schools to help students make incredible academic gains, we must recognize that accomplishing this mission will take more of just about everything. Children in low-income communities don't just deserve equal resources–they come to school facing severe socio-economic disadvantages, and it follows that equal resources will not result in equal outcomes. They deserve more, given the financial disparity between their communities and those where their wealthier peers live. We need to make sure that all children have access to resources that can help to truly level the playing field.

Institution-building. We need to recognize that building successful school systems is like building successful organizations in any sector. We need to recruit great people, develop talent at every level of the system, build strong achievement-oriented cultures within our schools, and implement effective systems for tracking progress and improving over time.

We know that all children can achieve at high levels when provided with the opportunities they deserve. To live up to our ideals as a nation, then, we can and must build a public education system with the mission, capacity, and resources to provide all children with an excellent education.

Wendy Kopp is the Founder and President of Teach For America. She began TFA after developing the idea in her senior thesis at Princeton University in 1989.

Nicole Baker is the Vice President for Research and Evaluation at Teach For America. She was a 1991 TFA corps member in Compton, California and then received a doctorate in Education at UCLA.

HOW HOUSTON IMPROVED ITS URBAN SCHOOLS

By Donald R. McAdams

Houston's public schools have improved since 1994. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is improving performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills significantly faster than schools statewide, and the gap between minority and white students is narrowing faster than the statewide average. HISD students, 77 percent of whom receive free or reduced price lunch, score at the national average on the Stanford 9. By nearly every metric that a school district can be measured–student achievement, human resource management, business operations–HISD is a rapidly improving school district.

Of course, much remains to be done. Houston may be one of the nation's best urban districts, but it is not a high performing district. By the standard the district has set for itself–all children learning at high levels–HISD is a failure. Still, there is reason to celebrate Houston's success and extract from the Houston experience lessons that might be of value to urban school reformers in other cities.

How did Houston do it? Good luck played a part. More than once, reform momentum was sustained by an unexpected open door or a single vote. But at root, Houston's schools improved because Houstonians demanded it. Houston's business and civic leaders and activist parents made school improvement a priority, actively involved themselves in board elections to elect reformers, and worked closely with the board and district to develop policies and create systems. And then they kept doing this year after year after year.

Partly but not entirely because of this civic leadership, a strong, visionary board has governed HISD for the past decade. Board members have come and gone, but the board has maintained its commitment to the 1990 *Declaration of Beliefs and Vision*, which committed the district to a sharp

focus on teaching and learning, school empowerment, accountability, and a common core of academic subjects for all students. Recently, the board added an addendum to *Beliefs and Vision*, which acknowledged the board's responsibility for eliminating the achievement gap.

HISD had the good fortune to be led by Superintendent Rod Paige from 1994-2001, but Houston has always been clear that its commitment to all children learning at high levels and its theory of action for change did not spring from the superintendent. Civic leaders, board members, Superintendent Paige, and senior district administrators worked together as a team–not always in perfect harmony to be sure–to understand better the theory and practice of urban school reform, to craft reform strategy, and to design business and instructional systems.

Houston is not a city that looks for a superintendent to provide a vision and a plan. Houston has a vision and a plan. It looks for a superintendent who can lead and manage a large, complex organization and implement the vision and plan.

This is not to suggest that Houston underestimates in any way the crucial leadership and management role of the superintendent. The HISD board always knew it was fortunate to have Rod Paige, who had served on the board from 1990-1994 and coauthored *Beliefs and Vision*, in the superintendent's chair. And it is pleased to have Kaye Stripling, a veteran HISD administrator, as its new superintendent.

Paige was expected to focus the district on student achievement, challenge it to reach stretch goals, and transform the

Houston has a vision and a plan.

culture from compliance to performance. He was expected to make good personnel appointments, develop a focused, waste-free budget, put into place an effective organizational structure, and solve problems. He was expected to develop close working relationships with the city's most influential business, civic, and political leaders. He did all this and much more.

Paige led and managed well, partly because he recognized that district reform was whole systems change. Business leaders like American General Chairman and CEO Harold Hook

helped board members, Paige, and school administrators understand that HISD was a complex, open, large, and dynamic system, that change to any part of the organization changed the entire organization, and that complex problems required complex solutions.

In the ongoing work of reform, the board always understood and usually succeeded in governing by policy and staying out of management. And Paige always understood and was sensitive to the political context in which the board operated. Board members and Paige understood that the board had the responsibility to create and sustain conditions for reform, but that only the superintendent could lead and manage reform.

Reform of Houston's public schools did not come to an end with the appointment of Rod Paige as Secretary of Education. Because the city owns Houston's theory of action for change, Houston has been able to transition smoothly from Rod Paige to Superintendent Kaye Stripling without missing a beat. Dr. Stripling has already brought numerous changes to HISD, but these changes have been along the same reform trajectory.

The challenge for Houston is to maintain this trajectory, even accelerate the rate of change, not just for Dr. Stripling's tenure, but indefinitely. Board members come and go. Even civic leaders retire. Houston still has a long way to go.

Indeed, HISD was not as bad in 1990 as its critics charged, and it is not as good today as its reputation. Even if 85 percent of fourth graders read on grade level, this means another 10 percent or more who should read on grade level don't. This is nearly 2,000 children! Far too many ninth graders never graduate. Reform of Houston's public schools has just begun.

There are many lessons other cities can learn from Houston, just as there are many Houston can learn from other cities. The most important lesson from Houston, perhaps, is that schools will only be as good as their communities demand, and that if a city remains united around a commitment to reform, in time, schools will improve.

Donald R. McAdams, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Center for Reform of School Systems, has served on the HISD school board since 1989. He is the author of* Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools ... and Winning! Lessons from Houston *(Teachers College Press, 2000).

BOOK REVIEWS

Analytic Processes for School Leaders. **Cynthia T. Richetti and Benjamin B. Tregoe. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA 2001**

This new publication from ASCD describes how to apply and benefit from analytic processes in educational environments. Richetti and Tregoe, senior administrators with the Tregoe Education Foundation, describe four step-by-step processes, using case examples from schools and districts in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The examples illustrate how applying these processes can sharpen the thinking–and improve the outcomes of thinking–for students and teachers as well as superintendents and principals.

The Kepner-Tregoe problem-solving and decision-making processes are the result of work begun by two RAND research scientists in the late 1950s, Benjamin Tregoe and Charles Kepner. They left RAND and founded a private international management consulting firm, where they continued and codified their research on decision-making processes. Over the past 40 years, more than 20 million people in 44 countries have received training in these problem-solving and decision-making processes, including such organizations as Johnson & Johnson, Honda, IBM, NASA, Sony, and the World Bank. Since 1993, the Tregoe Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization, has helped bring these skills to K-12 administrators, teachers, and students across the country.

Four problem-solving and decision-making processes are applied to four common types of situations:

1. Decision Analysis to help make choices.
2. Potential Problem Analysis to help implement changes or plans.
3. Problem Analysis to help figure out when something has gone wrong.
4. Situation Appraisal to help better understand a complicated or confusing issue.

The authors demonstrate that the basic tenets of effective decision-making remain consistent across different situations.

The authors write about the four processes with clarity and precision, and use the case examples effectively to show these processes in action. The case examples are well chosen, reflecting real and familiar school situations and demonstrating how this method can help administrators and teachers think through complex situations thoroughly and systematically. Teachers may also find the chapter on the role of good questions in producing good thinking especially illuminating.

ARP

***Making the Grade: Reinventing America's Schools.* Tony Wagner. Routledge. New York and London 2002.**

Tony Wagner opens his new book by asking us to take a fresh look at what is wrong with American schools and why so many students do so poorly. The problem is not, he argues, that the public schools have failed, it is that they are obsolete, virtually unchanged in more than one hundred years, despite the world having changed dramatically around them. He is critical of what he views as the inadequacies of the education reform movement, high-stakes testing in particular, and calls for us to reinvent rather than reform American public education.

An educator for more than thirty years, a change agent in schools for more than a decade, and currently co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Wagner brings to his book a wealth of insight and experience in the actual workings of schools as well as the processes of change. His argument is strengthened by his ability to call upon his firsthand experiences in schools.

Calling for thoughtful dialogue rather than facile solutions, he proposes that we shape the dialogue around key questions:

- How has the world changed for children?
- What do today's students need to know?
- How do we hold students and schools accountable?
- What do "good" schools look like?
- What must leaders do?

He devotes a chapter to each of these questions and the implications of the emerging answers.

Beginning the book with a look at how the world has changed for children is a powerful statement, philosophically

and structurally, because it forces us to think first about the reality of contemporary life for children, placing that, rather than any aspect of the educational system as it exists, squarely in the center of our vision. Placing children first, and considering change in the four broad categories of work, learning, citizenship, and motivation for learning, Wagner leads us to consider such issues as the impact on the young of

He documents the growing isolation of the young.

consumerism, the decline of civic engagement and everyday civility, and the loss of respect for authority. He documents the growing isolation of the young–how much time they spend alone, but most particularly, how little time they spend with adults (6.6 percent of their days), how deeply they feel that loss, and how important it is to restore connections between young people and adults. And he documents (in Chapter 2) how much consensus there is among adults (parents, teachers, college professors, employers, the general public) about what it is essential for young people to learn–and how profoundly that differs from either what is actually taught or the primary goals of the education reform movement.

Impassioned but not polemic, Wagner's book challenges us to reconsider the situation of our schools and students from a new and large perspective. He is refreshing in his ability to stand outside of polarizing debates (with the exception of testing) and stay focused on his vision of the big picture.

ARP

DID YOU KNOW?

By Anne Rogers Poliakoff and M. René Islas

U.S. High School Completion Rate Remains Constant

A recent U.S. Department of Education report finds the percent of students dropping out of school relatively unchanged since 1987. According to *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000*, 87 percent of all 18- through 24-year-olds not enrolled in high school in 2000 had completed high school or a GED. Among black students the completion rate was 84 percent, among whites, 92 percent. The dropout rate for students from the lowest 20 percent of family incomes was six times that of their peers from families in the highest 20 percent. For more details, visit http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/

Lower Graduation Rates Reported By Private Study

According to a Manhattan Institute for Policy Research study, commissioned by the Black Alliance for Educational Options, the national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 74 percent. For white students alone, that graduation rate was 78 percent; for African-American students, 56 percent; and for Latino students, 54 percent. According to *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, the discrepancy between NCES and this report is because NCES counts GED and other alternative credentials. For the complete report, see http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm

Science Scores for Twelfth-Graders Decline

According to the NCES *Science Report Card*, twelfth-grade NAEP science scores have declined since 1996, while fourth- and eighth-grade scores have remained steady. Eighty-two percent of our nation's twelfth-graders perform below the proficient level in science. The achievement gap between black and Hispanic twelfth-grade students and their classmates remains, but has closed slightly since 1996–because the scores of white students have declined. In the eighth grade, 68 percent of students perform below the proficient level, in the fourth grade, 71 percent. For more details, see http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/science/results/

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